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ABSTRACT

This paper is a collection of lessons that examine the many roles that women played in the Vietnam War and the consequences of their experiences for individuals, governments, and military policies. The series begins with an exercise in which students read 16 statements and then try to decide if they apply to U.S. women, Vietnamese women, or both. The lessons use poems from a collection written by women who served in Vietnam, excepts from the book "When Heaven and Earth Change Places" by Le Ly Hayslip, a Vietnamese woman who later became a naturalized U.S. citizen, and an interview with a woman who served as a soldier in the NLF (Viet Cong) movement. Questions are supplied to accompany poems from the book "Visions of War, Dreams of Peace." Background information, a detailed lesson plan, suggested teaching procedures, handouts, and transparency masters are included. Objectives of the lessons include: (1) identifying the tone, attitudes, and feelings expressed in the poetry of women who served in the Vietnam War; (2) served in that war; (3) identifying statements made by nurses from those of journalists and non-medical military personnel; (4) offering reasons to explain why women held the views they did; (5) identifying stressful factors associated with serving in the War that impacted the women working in Vietnam during the war; (6) expressing personal feelings and views about the women being studied; and (7) examining statistics about the numbers of deaths the Vietnam War brought about and its consequences for women. (DK)

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THE PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN ON THE VIETNAM WAR: THE WESTERN AND EASTERN VIEWS

ED 378 075

Paper presented as part of a workshop at the Midwest Regional of the National Council for the Social Studies St. Paul, April 24, 1994.

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The poems recommended for use in theses lessons appear in Visions of War, Dreams of Peace (1991). New York, Warner Books. This book is a collection of poems written by women who served in Vietnam and is edited by Lynda Van DeVanter and Joan A. Furey. Royalties from the sale of the book are being donated to the Vietnam Women Memorial Project, Inc. Washington. D. C.

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The Perspectives of Women on the Vietnam War: The Western and Eastern Views

Rationale:

Few Americans know that many western women went to Vietnam and served during the war. Most Americans also fail to think about the impact that the war had upon the women of Vietnam. These lessons examine the many roles that women played in the Vietnam War and the consequences of their experiences for individuals, governments, and military policies.

Exploration of the topic:

Ask the students to complete the exercise "Which Women's World?" and then to discuss their choices and make predictions requested in the exercise. Groups share their views in a class discussion. During this discussion the teacher affirms logical predictions and uses examples from the lives of the women support or challenge the students predictions.

Begin the class discussion by asking the groups if they had any difficulty deciding which statements described the American and Vietnamese women. At this point it is not as necessary for the responses to be correct as for them to be logical. Help the students answer those questions about which they are uncertain logically and factually. Statements that apply only to Vietnamese women are: 8,11,12,15 and (especially as the years passed) 6,9,10 and 14. Statements that apply only to American women are: 2,3,5,7 Statements true of both American and Vietnamese women are: 1,4,13 and perhaps also 7 and 12. The reading and quotation will help in answering the statements and this list will be returned to after the examination of the additional data.

Invention and testing of generalizations:

In the Prologue to <u>When Heaven and Earth Change Places</u> Le Ly Hayslip describes how and what she was taught to believe and act during her childhood. At the age of 13 Le Ly quickly fell from favor with the NLF (Viet Cong) when she was released from a prison after only a few days. Her mother used half of the gold for her dowry to bribe officials to obtain her release. The NLF refused this explanation and said that she had to have talked when indeed she had not. She received a death sentence, but those men who were to carry out the sentence raped her instead and threatened to kill her if she told. The men said that she repented and Le Ly left her village to live in larger cities where she lived by dealing on the black market. Later she married an older American who paid bribes to get her papers to immigrate to the U. S.

and became a U. S. citizen. She has been able to return to Vietnam and visit her family. She says that her book shows how the peasants were both a cause and victim of the war. Use the summary of her description as a reading to test student conclusions from the discussion of the exploration activity. Complete the exercise related to this book and then examine the quotations from other Vietnamese women. Most of Vietnamese women were warriors and all continue to live in Vietnam today. Duplicate these quotations, mount them on cards and distribute them to groups of students for examination. The poems should also be distributed. Have the students use the discussion guide questions for assistance in examining the interview and poems for their meaning.

Which Woman's World?

Since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, the world of women has changed. To understand the actions of women during the war, you must recognize the characteristics of the women's world during the war and not judge their behaviors by today's standards and expectations. Place a V on the blank next to sentences that you believe would typically describe the world of the Vietnamese woman and an A in the blank next to the sentences that describe an American woman's world of the 1960's and 1970's.

_____ 1. The vast majority of women look forward to marrying and having children.

_____ 2. Driving an automobile is a common behavior of women.

_____ 3.The young people of the nation have an optimistic view of their future.

_____ 4. Men make most of the political and economic decisions for the nation.

_____ 5. Higher education is relatively inexpensive and well within the means of the middle class. More women than ever are going to professional schools and colleges and becoming the first college graduates in their families.

_____ 6. Actions of the government might force you to move to a very different place from what you have known all of your life.

_____ 7. The major professions open to women are teaching, nursing, sales clerk, and office worker.

_____ 8. Women learn their economically productive skills from their mother.

_____ 9. You no longer feel safe in your home because you have seen violent actions threaten, wound, and kill people and destroy people's property.

_____ 10. You begin to work at an occupation that puts you in physical danger just to

survive.

_____ 11. The vast majority of women live in rural areas on small farms.

_____ 12. Marrying outside your race or religion is not encouraged by your family and friends but actively discouraged.

_____ 13. You live in a time of economic opportunity.

_____ 14. Economic conditions are deteriorating quite rapidly inflation is creating difficulty economic conditions for most families.

_____ 15. You have been taught that the most important thing is not your safety or happiness, but that your family survives.

_____ 16. You believe that the spirits of ancestors live in the community and demand that you live in harmony with them by accepting their guidance, and continuing to support the values they taught you.

Briefly summarize the lives of American women and Vietnamese women by listing three or four adjectives or phrases that describe the lives of the women.

What feelings and actions do you think you personally would take if you had been an American woman living in the USA during 1960's and early 1970's.

What feelings and actions do you think you personally would take if you had been a Vietnamese woman living in Vietnam during the 1960's and early 1970's

Summary of the beliefs and education of Le Ly Hayslip

As a peasant girls living in Ky La, a small village near Danang in Central Vietnam, Le Ly was taught by her father to love god, her family, traditions and her ancestors who were described as people she could not see. Her father told her the history of heroic ancient kings and women warriors, the Trung sisters who sacrificed their lives for freedom. "From my love of my ancestors and my native soil, he said, I must never retreat" (Hayslip, 1988, p. ix).

Her mother taught her humility and strength of virtue. Hard work was not a disgrace provided it was done without complaining. Her mother often asked, 'Would you be less than our ox who works to feed us without grumbling?' (Hayslip, 1988, p. ix). When she began to notice boys her mother stressed that there was no love beyond faithful love to her future husband, ancestors, and native soil.

She explains how as a teenager she learned about the war from the North Vietnamese cadre leaders during midnight meetings in the swamps outside her village. Because what the Viet Cong said matched the beliefs peasants already held, she says the peasants assumed that everything the heard from the northerners was true. The Viet Cong asked questions such as: 'Why should outsiders divide the land and tell some people to go north and others south? If Vietnam were truly for the Vietnamese, wouldn't we choose for ourselves what kind of government our people wanted?' (Hayslip, 1988, p. x). Reflecting now she explains that the cadre leaders encouraged the "natural prejudices (fear of outsiders and love our ancestors) with stirring songs and tender stories about Uncle Ho in which the Communist leader and our ancient heroes seemed to inhabit one congenial world. She translates the song taught and sung the to conclude indoctrinations sessions as:

> Americans come to kill our people,
> Follow America, and kill your relatives!
> The smart bird flies before it's caught.
> The smart person comes home before Tet.
> Follow us, and you'll always have a family.
> Follow America, and you'll always be alone. (p. x).

"We must hold together and oppose the American empire. There is nothing better than freedom independence, and happiness!" said the cadremen and Le LY gives her definitions for these words as *freedom* free of colonial domination, *independence* as one Vietnam not two countries, and *happiness* as plenty of food and an end to war and living our lives in accordance with our ancient ways." (p. xi-xii)

"'Western culture' meant bars, brothels, black markets, and *xa hoi van minh* -- bewildering machines-- most of them destructive....

> We children also knew that our ancestral spirits demanded we resist the outsiders. Our parents told us of the misery they had suffered from the invading Japanese in World War II, and from the French, who returned in 1946. These soldiers destroyed our crops, killed our livestock, burned our houses, raped our women, and tortured or put to death anyone who opposed the-- as well as many who did not. Now, the souls of all those people who had been mercilessly killed had come back to haunt Ky La-- demanding revenge against the invaders (p. xiii-xiv).

Le Ly did attend elementary school where she had a teacher who was a supporter of the government of South Vietnam. This teacher taught the children songs which praised the president of South Vietnam. Much to the dismay of Le Ly who always thought the teacher a kind and respectful person, he was killed by the Viet Cong. Her translation of the song is:

> In stormy seas, Vietnam's boat rolls and pitches.
> Still we must row; our President's hand upon the helm.
> The ship of state plows through heavy seas,
> Holding fast its course to democracy.
> Our President is celebrated from Europe to Asia,
> He is the image of philanthropy and love.
> He has sacrificed himself for our happiness.
> He fights for liberty in the land of the Viet.
> Everyone loves him earnestly, and behind him we will march
> Down the street of freedom, lined with fresh flowers,
> The flag of liberty crackling above our heads! (p. xi)

> ....Our ancestors called us to war. Our myths and legends called us to war. Our parents' teachings called us to war. Uncle Ho's cadre called us to war. Even President Diem had called us to fight for the very thing we now believed he was betraying -- and independent Vietnam. Should an obedient child be less than an ox and refuse to do her duty?
> ... And so the war began and became an insatiable dragon that roared around Ky La. By the time I turned thirteen, that dragon had swallowed me up. (p. x).

As an adult reflecting on her experiences which included a supporter of the Viet Cong, a death sentence, banishment from the village, marriage to an American, and living in the United States.

> ... If you were an American GI, I ask you to read this book and look into the heart of one you once called enemy. I have witnessed, firsthand, all that you went through. I will try to tell you who your enemy was and why almost everyone in the country you tried to help resented, feared,

and misunderstood you. It was not your fault. It could not have been otherwise. Long before you arrived, my country had yielded to the terrible logic of war. What for you was normal-- a life of peace and plenty-- was for us a hazy dream known only in our legends. Because we had to appease the allied forces by day and were terrorized by the Viet Cong at might, we slept as little as you did. We obeyed both sides and wound up pleasing neither. We were people in the middle. We were what the war was all about. (p. xv)

The least you did -- the least any of us did -- was our duty. For that we must be proud. The most that any of us did -- or saw-- was another face of destiny or luck or god. Children and soldiers have always known it to be terrible. If you have not yet found peace at the end of your war, I hope you will find it here. We have important new roles to play. (p. xv)

... Some people suffer in peace the way others suffer in war. The special gift of that suffering, I have learned, is how to be strong while we are weak, how to let go of that which we can no longer hold. In this way, anger can teach forgiveness, hate can teach us love, and war can teach us peace. (p. xv)

Reference

Hayslip, Le Ly. with Jay Wurts. When Heaven And Earth Change Places. New York: Plume Book, 1989.

1. After reading Le Li's description of her youth in Vietnam, do you wish to change any of your classification of the statements on women made yesterday?
2. What adjectives would you use to describe the Vietnamese peasants?
3. Summarize why you think the young teens would support the guerrilla forces rather than the government of South Vietnam?
4. Do you think the adult peasants were as supportive of the guerrilla movement as the teenagers? Explain you reasoning.
5. How does Le Ly Hayslip feel toward Vietnam today?
6. How do you think she feels about the U. S. A? What is your evidence for this conclusion?
7. How do you think American soldiers might respond to her statement? American female veterans of Vietnam might feel the same way? Explain the reasons for your conclusions.

Analysis of Poems by Vietnamese Women

Recommended poems from Visions of War, Dreams of Peace:

"To An Phu", page 55-- Questions to answer:

1. What is To An Phu?
2. What is the tone of the poem?
3. What traditional values described by Li Ly Hayslip are also present in the poem To An Phu?
4. Does the poem To An Phu have an expression of hope? If so, which lines of the poem?

"My Son's Childhood", page 32-- Questions to answer:

1. What is the tone of the poem?
2. This poem was written in 1969. How does the poem describe the war?
3. What do you think is the occupation of the mother who wrote the poem?
4. What in the poem leads you to this conclusion?

Interview

When interviewed by Morley Safer in 1989 Tran Thi Gung was forty-two. Her father was killed by the forces of South Vietnam in 1964. Shortly thereafter his father's friends came to her home and told her she should join the NLF movement. She was in the NLF from the age of 16 until the war ended. The following is part of the interview.

S: You killed a lot of people ... do you have any regrets now, ten, fifteen years later?
G: No.
S: None?
G: No. If I had not shot them, they would have killed me.
S: Any thoughts about their mothers or their wives; any bad dreams?
G: No. I sometimes dream about the fighting, but I would not call them bad dreams. If I were to think about mothers and wives, I would think about the Vietnamese mothers and wives. The Americans should have stayed home.
S: Have you ever met an American, talked to one?
G: Yes I captured one. They gave me a medal for it.
S: I ask for details.
G: There were three of us, me and two men. We had orders to set up a road block on the highway coming out of Cu Chi. We would collect a road tax sometimes that way. A military truck came along, and it shouldn't stop, so we shot out the tires, and it went into the ditch. We captured three of them. Two puppet soldiers and this big American.

We took their weapons... but we could not take the rice, so we burned it and set fire to the truck. My two comrades took the Vietnamese away. They told me to take the American back to our commander.
S: What did you do with the American?
G: I told him to take off his shoes and throw them away. I was afraid he would try to run away. I had my rifle and his M-16 and his leather bag... he had this leather bag, and it was full of money. Thousands of Vietnamese pasters and a lot of the American military money.

...On the way we walked through a hamlet, and there were some women there, and they ran and got sticks and tried to beat him. I told them to stop. He was my responsibility, and I had orders to take him to the base commander. They must have been mothers of guerrillas.

He started to complain that his feet were hurting, but I told him to keep walking. I think the Americans aren't used to walking barefoot the way we are.

He spoke to me in Vietnamese. He said he had studied it for six months in the United States. He told me he wanted to give me his watch.

I told him I don't need a watch... I already have a watch. He the offered me his pen. I already had a pen, so I said no. He told me he was twenty and asked how old I was, and I told him I was nineteen.

I made him walk ahead of me by some distance because I was afraid he would try to take the guns away from me if he was too close. He was so big, and I am so small. This man was the first American I had ever seen up close. I had been told the Americans were very ugly, but this man was tall with fair hair and very light skin, and he was very handsome.

...As we came near the base he told me I was pretty, and again he offered me his watch and his pen. Again I said no. If I took his presents, I might feel that I had to release him. I suppose he was hoping for something like that.

S: What happened to him when you got him to the base?

G: My friends were furious with me. They asked: "Why did you not blindfold him... you have orders to blindfold prisoners?' It is stupid, I told them. How could he walk blindfolded... and anyway he was too tall for me to blindfold. He would have overpowered me and probably killed me. Then they asked him a lot of questions, intelligence information. I don't remember what he answered.

S: Did they kill him?

G: This was not the policy. I suppose they sent him North and he was exchanged.

S: On a ceiling beam is a framed piece of silk; pinned to it are seven medals, two on top and five underneath.

Who do the medals belong to?

G: The two on top are mine says Gung. One was awarded for capturing the American... the other was just for fighting Americans. The five others belong to both of us. They give them for serving in the army... if you were in long enough, you get them. It's nothing. It's automatic.

S: Do you have more?

G: Yes, somewhere. She opens the dresser, rummages through spools of thread and half-darned socks. She pulls out a framed diploma with a medal attached to it, hands it to me without looking up. 'Hero of the revolution,' she mutters. And then:

Here it is... this is what you want to see.

S: She hands me a piece of gold colored metal attached to a piece of red and-yellow silk.

G: Hero American killer. (p. 168-173)

Safer, Morley. FLASHBACKS On Returning to Vietnam. New York: Random House. 1990.

1. List some adjectives you think describe Gung.
2. How would you describe Gung's feeling about the war?
3. Why do you think only some of Gung's medals are displayed in the house?

4. How is this interview different from LE Li Hayslip's view of the war? In what way is it similar?

Quotations by Vo Thi Mo

Vo Thi Mo joined the National Liberation Forces at the age of fifteen after the destruction of her family's home and property. She was a member of the elite fighting group of women known as the C3. She fought and spied in the Cu my rifle area north of Saigon and lived in and used the tunnels as a home and place of protection. The following quotations are from: Mangold, Tom and John Penycate. The Tunnels of Cu Chi. New York: Berkley Books, 1985.

> It had been a prosperous area, there were many fruit trees, many cattle; life had not been easy but we had lived well enough by our honest endeavors. When the Americans came, they devastated the area. They bombed and shelled until ten in the morning, and then their troops landed at the Go Lap, An Phu, and Dat Thit plantations. (p. 230)

> The first time I killed and American, I felt enthusiasm and more hatred. I thought I would like to kill all the Americans to see my country peaceful again. Many people in my village were killed by bombs and shells. In one shelter, over ten of my fields were killed by napalm bombs. You know how napalm burns. When we pulled the bodies out, they had only burned and crooked limbs. These battles kindled my hatred. I did not think of myself, I did not think of hardship. The Americans considered the Vietnamese animals; they wanted to exterminate us all and destroy everything we had. (p. 237)

1. Do you agree with Vo Thi Mo's description of the views and goals of American soldiers?

2. What motivated Vo Thi Mo? If you had been in her shoes, do you think you would have felt the same ways she felt? Why or why not?

3. In what ways are the stories of the female warriors similar? In what ways are they different?

Views of American Women on the Vietnam War and Its Consequences

At the dedication of the Women's Vietnam Memorial Vice-President Al Gore said, "In the tense, sometimes confusing peace that followed, (the Vietnam War) we never listened to their story, and we never properly thanked them. Dedicating this memorial gives us occasion to do both." November 11, 1994.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The names of Sharon Lane, Elizabeth Jones, Annie Graham, Hedwig Orlowski, Pamela Donovan, Eleanor Alexander, Carola Drazba, and Mary Klinker are among the more than 58,000 names on The Wall at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D. C. Like the men whose names surround theirs, these women died serving their county in the Vietnam War. But, thousands of other American women served in Vietnam and few people know of their accomplishments or the struggles to overcome the impact that the war had upon their lives. But beginning in 1984 this began to change when Diane Carlson Evans organized the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, Inc. to be a "legacy of hope and healing" for both the women and nation.

Many of the women who served in Vietnam were in very high stress situations which were made even more stressful by a lack of support from their families and the military upon their return to the USA. In addition to the anti-war attitudes which impacted their male counterparts, the women also faced sexist attitudes in both the society and the military which added to their post war stresses and trials. So, also, did an ignorance of the knowledge of the presence of the women and their dedication to their jobs. Therefore, the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project has as its goals more than the adding of a statue to the memorial. Their project is a way for women to come together to share their experiences, comfort each other, obtain their recognition and benefits, and to leave behind the wisdom they gained through their experiences. In their "sister search program" they are concentrating on locating women who served in all capacities. This is a difficult task because many have never before admitted to friends their service in Vietnam or associated with veterans organizations. The women active in the concern are helping these women to deal with the post- traumatic-stress

-syndrome (PTSD). Among the interests of the Women's Vietnam Memorial Project is encouraging women to learn to deal with PTSD and to work through the experience so that they can have more satisfying lives.

This lesson explores the feelings and attitudes of a sample of the American women whose lives were, for better or worse, greatly impacted by the Vietnam War. (The poems and quotations used in the lesson are those of nurses, Red Cross SRAO workers, journalists, and the Director WAF who was the highest ranking women in the Air Force during the Vietnam War. It explores the range of feelings that the women experienced and describes the realities of the war they saw. The lesson is designed to be an active inquiry of one or two days duration and has three parts. In the introduction students use poems written by service women years after their war experience that reflect upon war. Students are asked to respond to the poems by identifying the feelings of the women and their own personal reactions to the poems. In the development of the lesson, the students work in small groups and read the poems and quotations by women who served in the various capacities. Students use a series of discussion questions to guide their exploration of the variety of feelings and experiences described. In the closure of the lesson the entire class discusses their group and personal responses and considers the causes of the stress and coping strategies for dealing with stress.

DETAILED LESSON PLAN

Objectives:

1. Given the poems written by women who served in the Vietnam War, students identify the tone, attitudes and feelings expressed in the poems.

2. Given quotations made by women who served in Vietnam, students identify various view points about the Vietnam War.

3. Students attempt to identify those statements made by nurses from those of the journalists and the non-medical military personnel.

4. Students offer reasons to explain why they believe the women held their various views.

5 Students identify stressful factors associated with serving in the way in Vietnam that impacted the women working in Vietnam during the war.

6. Students express their views and feelings about the women whose words they have read and analyzed.
7. Students examine statistics about the numbers of deaths the war in Vietnam brought about by the Vietnam war and its consequences for women.

Teaching Procedure:

Begin exploring the awareness and knowledge of the students about the roles of Women in the Vietnam War by using the poems. Display a copy of the poems for easy reference to words and phrases. Ask the students to respond to the following questions:

"What are some of the things that these women are saying about war?"

"Are you surprised by any of these statements?" "Why or why not?"

Ask students to raise their hands in responses to questions about the sources of their information.

"What are your sources of information about the women who served in Vietnam? How many of you have ever encountered any first hand accounts from the women? What second hand accounts have you heard? How many of you are using hypotheses or guesses?"

Explain to the students that the poems are primary data and that they were primarily written after the war. Then explain that you will divide the class into discussion groups and give each group a packet of quotations that were made by American women who served in Vietnam, but that only some of the women were in the military. Organize the class into small discussion groups. Distribute one copy of the directions, quotations and discussion questions along with the the quotations to each group. Monitor the groups to allow plenty of time to read and discuss. Each quotation is identified by the speaker, its printed source and the occupation of the women. Distribute copies of the the poems and appropriate questions as discussion guides to small groups of students or use the poems in a class discussion.

Bring closure to the discussion and lesson by summarizing, affirming and/or challenging the groups' conclusions through a whole class discussion. Be certain that the students make logical predictions and use the data from the quotation to support their statements. .

CONCLUSION

The teacher may wish to complete the study of women and the Vietnam War simply by using this lesson which requires about a day and a half to two days of class time. However, should time permit this lesson can serve as an introduction to a larger study of the roles of women during the Vietnam War. This lesson is limited to only a few of the many roles that American women filled during the war. For a more extensive discussion of the roles of both Western and Vietnamese women see: " Women's Perspectives on the Vietnam War" in THE LESSONS OF THE VIETNAM WAR.

Teachers are cautioned against sending their students out to try to locate and interview women who served in the Vietnam War without preparing them for the problems they many encounter and making them sensitive to the feelings of the persons they are seeking to interview. The experiences of Vietnam Veterans vary depending upon the year and the individual assignment. This lesson illustrates the great pain and stress that many of the American women faced and still face today. Some of the women are still not prepared to discuss what they encountered during and after the war with trained counselors and veterans not to mention teenagers. Others such as those whose words are used in this lesson are quite willing to speak to students and share their experiences. Students should not pressure others for an interview and need to accept the need and right of someone to say no. Should an individual agree to an interview, the students must be aware that one interview, while it is representative of the experiences of the individual interviewed, is not a representative sample.

Most of the women who served in Vietnam consider the Vietnam experience for all of its pain to be, in retrospect, the most challenging and satisfying experience of their life. They were called upon to use all of their talents to perform meaningful and important tasks, and they have come to realize that they are proud of their service and accomplishments (Haas, 1991).

The quotations used in this lesson have been selected to represent a variety of experiences and responses. Mount the following poems and quotations on individual cards for groups to use. Each group should have a complete set of the quotations.

HANDOUTS AND TRANSPARENCY MASTERS

DIRECTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

1. Begin by dividing up the quotations and poems among your members.
2. Each student should then read their quotations to become familiar with them.
3. Each member of the group then tells or reads their quotation or poem to the remainder of the group.
4. Using the following small group discussion guide, the groups answer and discuss their responses to the questions.

GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION OF QUOTATIONS

1. How do these quotations make you feel?
2. Which women do you think faced the most stressful situations during the war? Why?
3. What do you think are the best ways to cope with stress?
4. Can we list 5 or 6 things that might have happened in Vietnam to these women that would have caused them great stress?
6. Since none of the women were drafted, why do you think these women went to Vietnam?

THE "VIETNAM VET"

The "Vietnam Vet"

people instantly conjure

their own picture
in their mind

Is it ever of a woman?
Huddled . . . somewhere. . .
alone sleeping
trying desperately to shut out the world
that shut her out
or
that disappeared as she reached out to trust it

Is it ever that vision?
that woman - Norma J. Griffiths 1982

VIETNAM, OPPRESSIVE HEAT

Vietnam, Oppressive Heat--
The Malignant Stench Compressing The Senselessness Of--
Dying Life and Living Death
Of Frenzy, Fear, Frustration--
Conceived By Doubt, Deceit and Damnation.
Wrought of Human Sacrifice--
Theirs And,
Ours--

Penny Kettlewell
1990

How to bandage a war.

**You do it a wound at a time.
A person at a time. With all
your skills as a nurse. With
all the cheerfulness in your
heart. You do it because you
want to. You do it because
you're an Army Nurse
The Army Nurse Corps.**

From an Army Recruiting Poster of 1969

"After twenty-seven years of military friction, war has become monotonous in Vietnam. The Vietnamese soldier, who has never known a state of peace, has become very casual about the whole affair.

Can one blame them for their terrific desertion rate? Or for their frequently lazy approach to combat? Vietnamese are affectionate, sensitive men, who love their families. They are very sentimental about their wives and children. Seeing little purpose or progress in the war, they want to preserve their lives for their families. The Viet Cong are intense and ferocious fighters, because they have an ideology. Our vacillating strategies have kept those Vietnamese who are on our side from having a sense of direct commitment to the war.

. . . . .It is hard, under these circumstances, to feel sure that 'we are winning the war.' And even when you live in a city like Hue, it is difficult to know what is really going on, or to foresee what tomorrow will bring."

Philippa Schuyler, Journalist and concert pianist

(April 21, 1967. "What Is Really Going On?" Union Leader, Manchester, New Hampshire.)
Ladies' Home Journal.)

You can't imagine some of the things I saw. Before one of my first firefights I had interviewed this guy, spent three days with him, gotten to know him. He showed me pictures of his wife and kids, and he had two weeks left, and he'd been wounded twice, and was sent there. The next thing I knew, I looked over and he didn't have a head anymore."
Jurate Kazickas, Journalist (Maurer, Harry. 1989. page 232)

"I lost my direction and found myself becoming a person I would never have been before Vietnam. . . . Like thousands of Americans, I began calling the Vietnamese- both friendly and enemy- 'gooks.' I would have thought I was above that sort of racism; after all, hadn't I marched in the United States for civil rights like a good Catholic girl who believed all oppression was wrong?. . . Now I saw the Vietnamese as nothing more than a group of thieves and murders. . . . They were the ones who kept killing American soldiers. Why should we bother saving them." Lynda Van DeVanter, Nurse (Van Devanter, L. and Morgan, C. 1983, p. 156.)

"As far as having been there and what it's meant to me. . . I don't think I've ever been the same. I think before I went to Vietnam I was a really very happy-go-lucky, freewheeling kind of person. I think I still am, but I don't think I've ever taken life as lightly as I did then. . . . I've never really talked about the painful part of Vietnam to anyone. Mostly because I don't want to think about it myself." Pat Johnson, Nurse (Walker, K. 1985. p. 65.)

"WAF airmen continually ask me why they are not allowed to 'pull their share of the burden in Southeast Asia when men who have families must go involuntarily, and some may now be threatened with second tours. These women know that nurses, civil service employees, WAC's and Red Cross women are serving in Southeast Asia and they can find no logical reason why enlisted women in the Air Force should be considered unacceptable by their own Service. While lack of housing may have been

a good excuse initially, it becomes less and less acceptable as time goes on." Jeanne Holm, in 1967 when serving as the Director of Women in the U. S. Air Force. (Holm, J. 1982, p. 222)

Many of the women who served in Vietnam have written poems that express their feelings. As they have worked through their problems and feelings about the war the poems have changed in tone as have their views. To help in securing the funds for the statue to honor the women who survived the war and who are proud of their accomplishments during the war, some of the poems were collected into a book and the revenue from the book goes to support the women's memorial. You'll need to purchase the book to have the poems. Poems from Visions of War, Dreams of Peace suggested for analysis:

1. "Our War" by Diane Carlson Evans pages 95-97.
2. "Some Days" by Joan A. Furey pages 89-93.

Use the following questions for these two poems.

1.) In "Some Days" what emotions are expressed?
2.) Why might Joan A. Furey not have wanted to be back in the USA and out of the war?
3.) What was the war experiences of the nurses like?
4.) In "Our War" what emotions does Diane Carlson Evans express?
5.) Diane Carlson Evans founded and led the foundation that resulted in the addition of the women's statue to the Vietnam Memorial. What in the poem illustrates her determination to make the statue a reality?
6.) Do these two women describe the war as having the same characteristics? What are those common characteristics?

3. "Coral Bay" by Joan A. Furey pages 197-198.

1.) Contrast the views in "Coral Bay" with the author's views in "Some Days."
2.) What do the differences tell you about how the author's experiences during and after the war have impacted her life?

4. "Letter From Home" by Dana Shuster page 34.

1.) While in Vietnam how did the nurses come to view the U.S. A?
2.) What is meant by the term the "big PX?"

3.) Do you think letters from home were important to the women who were in Vietnam?

4.) What did the families of the women know of the concerns and changes in the lives of their daughters?

5. Poems by Lynda Van Devanter Buckley

"TV Wars First Blood Part II" page 190.

"Middle East Montage" page 191

" Making Friends" page 205

"For Molly" page 204.

" It's Too Easy" page 183

1.) Look carefully at the dates on the poems. How has the tone of Lynda's poems changed over time?

2.) How does she feel about war today?

3.) Most of the American women who went to Vietnam volunteered, that is they were not drafted into the military and sent to Vietnam. Judging from their words and poems how would you describe their view of wars and warfare today?

4.) Why do you think the Lynda Van Devanter and Joan A. Furey the editors of Visions of War, Dreams of Peace included poems written by Vietnamese women in the book?

Expansion of Understandings:

Discuss with the students the differences in the views of the eastern and western women toward the war. Ask the following questions to accomplish the review:

1. In what ways were the views of the Eastern and Western women different?
2. In what ways were the views of the women similar?
3. What do you think were the major causes for the differences?

Use the poems "The Vietnamese Mother" page 41 and "Dear Mom" page 40 in Visions of War, Dreams of Peace as a source of information for a final discussion. After

reading the two poems, ask the following question:

1. What do the two poems have in common?

2. How does the death of a son immediately affect a mother?

3. In the long term how does the death of a son affect the economic well being of the mother who lives in the U. S. A.? in Vietnam?

4. In many Vietnamese villages only half of the soldiers returned after the war. About 300,000 Vietnamese are listed as missing-in-action and there were 131,000 widows and 300,000 orphans at the end of the war. How might these numbers affect a nation with the values that we found were important in Vietnam?

5. What roles in society and the government of Vietnam might be open to women in Vietnam because so high a percent of the young men died during the Vietnam War? What help might the women need to care for their famlies?

6. How might the lack of males affect the decisions families in Vietnam might make for their children born after the war ended? Do you think parents would make the same decisions for males and females if the economic conditions were very harsh? Why or why not?

7. Historically, wars have provided opportunities for the advancement of women, but the gains are often lost after the war. This does not appear to be the case for American women. Why is this true? What do you think about the Vietnamese women? Defend your answer.

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